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Making America Great Again: The Difference Between Being “Anti-Immigration” and “Anti-Immigrant”

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I love being American. Despite our many faults, I grew up just knowing that America is a place of freedom and equality and that the American people are moral and strong. We were founded to escape religious persecution, and we are proud to preach for the world to hear about our freedom of religion, speech and our commitment to equal treatment of all people.

Then why am I ashamed of us? Why am I hearing hateful talk about Mexican workers, ignorant bashing of the Islamic faith and a complete disregard for everything our country is supposed to stand for?

I’m not here to comment on immigration reform or to push a political agenda. I don’t have a solution. I’m just confused as to why the moral, strong people of America have so much hate in their hearts.

I wonder how we keep making the same mistakes. How many times are we going to do this? Why were we biased against women, African-Americans, the LGBTQ community and countless other populations? Why are we doing it today? Why haven’t we learned?

The phrase “anti-immigration” means that we oppose the act of people moving into our country. The phrase “anti-immigrant,” on the other hand, implies the ethnocentric attitudes we’ve been exhibiting toward people outside of the United States.

The issue is not whether or not we should allow immigrants to cross our borders. The issue is the way we talk and think about the *human beings* who want to join our home.

If the phrase “anti-immigrant” isn’t the most “anti-American” set of words I have ever heard, I’m not sure what is. America can’t be anti-immigrant. Immigrants are people, and we are supposed to value all people. We are the land of equality.

We are a country of immigrants. We always have been. Isn’t it ironic how those who claim to be looking out for the integrity of America with spiteful prejudices are really just turning their backs on their ancestors

and their country’s foundation?

Regardless of whether we choose to allow more immigrants into our country, we need to stop bashing them as people. We can’t continue to act as though it’s “us” versus “them.” Not so long ago, we were “them” as well. Separate from whether or not they become new Americans, we simply can’t be against people in search of a better life.

As President Obama aptly noted, “how quickly we forget. One generation passes, two [generations pass], and suddenly we don’t remember where we came from.” So quickly we feel entitled to shut the door on others, though the door was held open for us.

As it says on the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty: “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, the tempest-tossed, to me: I lift my lamp beside the golden door.”

You’d be hard-pressed to find an American who would blatantly support bigotry and racism, but our actions are speaking louder than our words. I don’t want to be ashamed of my country’s people. I don’t want to see them cheering and clapping at anti-Muslim rallies or supporting deportation of second generation Americans.

If we are truly committed to “making America great again,” we need to teach our people to accept those who are different than us. We need to remember that it was once we who journeyed to America in search of a better life. As it always has been, the United States is a place for moral, strong, accepting people.

We aren’t the only ones in pursuit of life, liberty and happiness.

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